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Influence of Head Teachers' Democratic Styles on Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Mulanje District, Malawi

By

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate head teachers' democratic style on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Mulanje District, Malawi. The study was anchored on Path-Goal Theory of leadership, developed by Robert House in 1971. It was guided by Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design. The target population for the study consisted of all 28 public secondary schools, 28 head teachers, 28 deputy head teachers, 9,950 students and 450 teachers from public secondary schools and one (1) Education Division Manager of the District. The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Extreme case sampling technique was used to select 15 public secondary schools. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select 326 students and 112 teachers to participate in the study. Automatic inclusive sampling technique was employed to select 15 deputy head teachers, 15 head teachers and 1 Education Division Manager. A total sample size of 469 participants participated in the study. Data collection were questionnaires, interviews guide, documents analysis guide and observation guide. Cronbach Alpha technique determined the reliability of the quantitative research instruments that were pilot tested before use in the field. Reliability for qualitative instruments was determined by checking their trustworthiness in terms of their credibility and dependability. Descriptive statistics particularly means, standard deviation and frequencies and percentages with using statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) analyzed quantitative data and results presented in frequency distribution tables. One way Analysis of Variance tested the hypotheses. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically and findings were presented in narrative form and direct quotes. Research ethics were observed throughout the entire research process. From the findings of the study the majority of the participants revealed that democratic leadership style influences students' discipline because students, teachers, and parents are involved in decision making concerning discipline issues and management of the school and among others. The study concludes that democratic style has both a positive and negative great influence on students' discipline. Although, some respondents had different opinions that the use of head teachers' democratic leadership style negatively influences students' discipline because sometimes students have too much freedom if the head teachers do not use it accordingly. It is also time-consuming in terms of consulting people before making the decision. Therefore, the study recommends that head teachers should adopt democratic leadership style because it has both positive and negative influences on students' discipline

Key words: Head teachers' democratic leadership style, students' discipline, Malawi

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Introduction

The concept of leadership can be defined and interpreted differently by different researchers in different elements of what leadership implies on a global basis. Northouse (2016) defines leadership as “a process by which an individual inspires a group of people to accomplish a common goal. Further, according to Northouse it is a process of inspiring others to pursue one's goal within the constraints set by oneself to the point where it becomes a shared effort, shared vision, and shared achievement.” Leadership involves creating change, not maintaining the status quo. It is the ability of a leader to acquire influence, power, and legitimate authority in order to effectively transform an organization through the direction of human resources, which are the most important organizational assets, resulting in the achievement of desired goals. As a result, the head teacher is expected to play a vital role in decision-making, task facilitation, problem solving, and change management. A leader is someone who motivates others to take action and transforms them into change agents.

Leadership is of paramount importance for the success of any institution. It is the art of influencing people to direct their will, abilities, and efforts towards the accomplishment of common goals. Globally, the concept of leadership is defined by different scholars as they perceive what leadership means. For instance, Rundassa (2017) defines leadership as a process of motivating and assisting people in achieving goals with zeal.

According to D'Souza (2016), leadership is focused on a certain goal and aims to address the requirements of the individual or group by performing the desired functions. Leadership entails bringing about change rather than sustaining the status quo. Leadership is a social influence process that maximizes the efforts of others in order to attain a goal. In the social interactions of groups at work in organizational institutions, leadership is critical. Leaders require followers, and followers need leaders. Leadership is the skill of influencing individuals to use their willpower, abilities, and efforts to achieve common goals.

Good leadership is indispensable if the school has to be successful. This implies that head teachers, therefore, must lead well and manage their schools effectively to influence teachers and students towards achieving the school objectives. Leadership in any institution serves several functions crucial to the success of an organization in that they help direct various resources to improve efficiency and achieve goals. One of the foremost functions is the provision of a clear vision. In a school setting, an effective head must provide a clear vision for the school; explain to the teachers, students, non-teaching staff, parents, and other stakeholders what that vision is and the activities each should be engaged in to make it a reality. The vision should indicate what a school can achieve and the head's work is to provide a clear road map outlining steps and the resources the school needs to become successful. For instance, the head teacher guides the teachers and students on curriculum implementation, provides the learning resources required and provides guidelines on their effective use for learners to acquire right knowledge and skills for successful completion of their studies. It is the leaders' responsibility to harness individual resources to achieve a common goal.

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When members have understood the vision of the school, an effective leader should foster an atmosphere of creativity in the school. The head of the school should provide flexibility on how the staff and the students should work, inspire and provide insights on how work is to be performed in various departments to achieve success on objectives and goals of education. As the work progresses, the staff, the students, and other stakeholders are likely to encounter challenges that hamper their success. It is the responsibility of the leaders to provide guidance and assist people under them to minimize these potential threats that affect their potential of producing good results.

Effective leader leaders work hard through inspiration, mentorship, motivation, coordination, and accountability to help all in school to achieve excellence. Another leadership skill that makes an institution grow is the leaders' ability to assist people to excel in their workplace through the provision of positive feedback. This is where the leader boosts high morale among the staff by encouraging them to give input on how to improve work processes and reward excellence to enhance creativity. Studies have shown that creating high morale among the staff and students reduces distraction and motivates them to devote their energies' to achieving the school goals.

The functions of leadership are well supported in the literature. For instance, D'Souza (2016) maintains that leaders should focus on a specific purpose and seeks to meet the needs of the member of the group by performing the desired functions. Leadership involves creating change, not maintaining the status quo. As used in this study, the concept of leadership in an educational organization is the way the head teacher influences, inspires and motivates his/her followers (students and teachers) in the school to achieve their expected objectives. Teklemariam (2011) supports the idea that leadership deals with higher-order tasks designed to improve staff, students' behavior, and school performance, hence it focuses on people. To accomplish these tasks effectively, school heads must employ a specific leadership style in diverse situations.

Leadership styles are specific behaviors used by leaders to influence, inspire and motivate people to achieve specific objectives and goals. Kurt Lewin (1939), a psychologist led a group of researchers to identify three different styles of leadership; they include authoritarian, democratic and Laissez fair. This early study was very influential that further research used it as a springboard to establish more leadership theories.

Autocratic leadership also known as Authoritarian leadership refers to a situation where leaders make the decision independently, with little input from group members. Laissez-Faire leadership is where a leader gives little or no guidance to group members but leaves them to do what they want and make decisions by themselves. Democratic leadership is also known as participative leadership, refers to where leaders participate in the group and allow input from other group members. In other words, democratic leaders solicit the group member's views and incorporate them into decision-making. They inspire members of the group to participate, but they have the last word in decision-making. This is the way leaders make members of the group feel more involved in the process and more driven and innovative in their contributions to the achievement of the objectives. According to Lewin's study, participative leadership is the most effective leadership style of the three.

Many researchers have conducted studies on the influence of leadership styles on students' discipline in public secondary schools globally, regionally, and locally, including Malawi in the past and recent years. Educationists and other stakeholders across the world have recognized leadership styles as important aspects of an educational system. These have been previously used to assess students' discipline in public secondary schools (World Bank,

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2017). Mbiti (2007) describes discipline as a system of guiding the student or the staff to make reasonable decisions and the ability to control class to achieve the desired behavior. Hence good discipline should lead to obedience, self-control cooperation, and being accountable for one's behavior. The purpose of discipline in a school is to create and maintain conducive conditions favorable for learning and teaching and to make the young person responsible when they grow to adulthood. In a school setting each head teacher has his/her style of leadership in managing or running the school smoothly by instilling discipline among students. Since the core function of any educational institution is teaching and learning, a good school, therefore, is identified by the way the students behave and perform academically, morally, and in all other aspects of school activities. All these depend on the leadership of the head of that particular school.

Research studies have shown that different leadership styles influence students' discipline in a school. This depends on how the school leaders guide and direct the students, the teachers, and the entire school to commit themselves to achieving the expected objectives. This happens when students obey rules and regulations to attain mutual respect and a desired system of values to maintain discipline. A good school head utilizes three types of discipline to create and maintain a good school environment for teaching and learning; they include preventive discipline, supportive discipline and corrective discipline. In preventive discipline, the school heads ensure that they establish clear rules and regulations which when observed, prevent disruptions in each section of the school environment. The rules are inclusive of prohibited items not allowed in the school because they are considered dangerous to the entire school community. They include illegal drugs, alcohol, sharp objectives like knives among others. Support discipline are the measures taken when the established rules and regulations are broken by students and staff. This implies that school heads must have a documented type of offences and established a range of disciplinary procedures and measures to be taken when they are not observed. These are communicated to the students, the staff and the parents. The corrective measures are applied when the supportive discipline does not yield the required results. It is also the responsibility of the head teacher to ensure that the school has demarcated measures to be taken to correct the deviant behaviors of the students. All these measures should enable the staff and student leaders to administer discipline appropriately.

Leading and motivating teachers requires specific skills on the part of the head teacher as a leader. It is widely acknowledged that in schools where the leadership shows empathy and care about the staff, the productivity of the teachers is high. The school leadership needs to use motivators such as teachers' needs for achievement, recognition, responsibility, personal growth, and professional growth as a way of motivating the staff. School performance is determined by the leadership styles of administrative supervisors who play a crucial role in an organization's performance (Kapena, 2010). According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2014), head teachers should guarantee that the school runs smoothly while also maintaining high levels of student discipline. The head teacher's job is to develop a link with the immediate community to foster better coexistence. Head teachers must encourage and channel student discipline into society, as well as push all stakeholders to participate in school events to share ideas and minimize problems in the school. In a school setting, these leadership styles may have a positive or detrimental (negative) influence on students' discipline, depending on how they are applied by head teachers in various schools to achieve their goals. Head teachers play a critical role in maintaining students' discipline to achieve their expected goals.

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According to Mbiti (2009), the head teacher is charged with the responsibility of supervising and harmonizing the roles of the school staff such as teaching staff and non-teaching staff including student leaders in a school. Therefore, the head teacher is the leader of the school and his/her leadership style determines the extent to which the school meets its educational goals. Students' behavior and a school's performance are indicators of whether it is a good or bad school in terms of discipline. Hammer and Whisman (2014) assert that head teachers should motivate students, teachers, and support staff to work towards a common goal. The attitude of the head teacher in a school to a large extent determines if or not the head teacher would incorporate followers in leadership. If the head teacher believes and trusts his/her followers, would give power to fellow members and that would promote effectiveness in performing various leadership tasks as well as reduce his/her workload by instilling students' discipline in schools.

Globally, people are rejecting poor leadership and demanding more participatory and democratic approaches (Read, Pat, & Barbara, 2005). Students have in the past protested against political regimes, and conditions in schools, or society as a whole (Mbiti, 2007). The quality of the school in any given nation is predicated on the workings of the internal mechanisms that are geared towards enhancing discipline among the students. An effective strategy would look at how the institution is led by the head teacher. At the core, leadership places the head teacher of the school at the center of constantly relaying the school's vision as well as breaking down the mission to the teaching fraternity, the students, and all other stakeholders. Head teachers are responsible for checking and tracking the general performance of students to improve their performance and also checking on their behavior concerning discipline issues. This promotes an ideal environment for learning.

A study was conducted by Jerome (2017) on the assessment of the current state of education in the Caribbean in Jamaica. The purpose was to assess whether there was a relationship between the leadership styles of the head teachers and violence in two Parish secondary schools in rural and urban. The study revealed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation ($r=0.88$) at the $p<.05$ level of significance observed in autocratic leadership in the Parish school of St. Ann. A moderate significant correlation was recorded in St. Catherine in democratic leadership ($r= -.52$) at the level of $p< 0.01$. This means that autocratic leadership and democratic leadership styles complement each other whereby the head teachers use power and enforce rules and regulations to be obeyed by students to maintain discipline in schools.

Similarly, Chanda, Songolo, and Mutekenya (2021) investigated the management of students' discipline in Norway: a case study of Sognal Municipality. The study established that the Ministry of Education and Research recognizes guidance and counseling as one of the methods of managing students' discipline in schools. Since the school is a social learning institution run by different stakeholders, the head teachers, teachers, and parents have the responsibility to formulate rules and regulations to maintain the discipline of students. They should put strict measures or strategy (s), for instance, appropriate for those who disobey rules and regulations as a way of deterring further occurrence of similar mischiefs.

A study conducted by Adams and Muthiah (2019) on school principals and 21st Century leadership challenges: a systematic review in Malaysia, revealed that discipline and social problems, drug abuse, theft, defiance of authorities, and others are challenges encountered by school principals in the 21st century. This means that all over the world head teachers are faced with challenges of student indiscipline cases in schools.

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In Ethiopia, Rundassa (2017) conducted study on school leadership practices and problems: the case of some selected secondary schools in Addis Ababa City, University of Ethiopia. Key findings showed that all school leaders in the selected secondary schools lacked principal ship and educational leadership training. Their lack of leadership skills could have contributed to their mismanagement of the schools, particularly in not actively involving parents in decision-making. It indicated that principals lacked a democratic leadership style that allowed parents to participate to give their views on the effective running of the school. Similarly Kolawale, et al (2018) investigated on the influence of principals' sex experience and age on their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline in public secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District, Nigeria. The study revealed that principals adopted three leadership styles namely; democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline. Among the three, the democratic leadership style was mostly applied by principals managing students' indiscipline in Edo North Senatorial, Nigeria. This could be because the school leadership involved students in decision-making, they accepted the final decision and were committed to working hard and observing rules which minimized indiscipline cases.

Research studies have shown that any of the leadership styles utilized by the head teacher can trigger students' unrest. In Uganda for instance, Moses (2018) investigated head teachers' leadership styles and students' unrest in public secondary schools in Sheema District, Uganda. The findings showed that laissez-faire, autocratic, and democratic leadership styles in some way contributed to students' unrest. This implies that each of the three leadership styles had a negative influence on students' discipline. This signifies that democratic and transformational leadership styles were preferred by head teachers for the smooth running of schools followed by involving students in decision-making and motivating them. Similar observations were made by Akala et al. (2019) who investigated the impact of administrators' collaborative decision-making on student discipline in Kenyan public secondary schools. The study discovered that collaborative decision-making took place inside the school setting to improve school discipline. It was also discovered that 83.7 % of principals said that class meetings were used as an alternate disciplinary approach. The study revealed that there was no significant difference between class meetings for collaborative decision-making and students' discipline. This means that principals involved students in collaborative decision-making as members of the disciplinary committee so that they could feel like members of the management team of the school.

Another study was done by Godfrey (2016) on heads of schools' approaches to managing secondary school students' discipline at Korogwe Town Council, Tanzania. It was found that heads of schools used multiple approaches based on the nature and type of discipline problems they encounter. The majority of the principals delegated the task of maintaining students' discipline to other teaching staff. Although principals held a huge responsibility in the school; they did not receive any formal training after the appointment to update themselves with current knowledge and skills of managing students' discipline. They were dependent on their knowledge of policies about the management of students' discipline. The study also revealed that the majority of school heads perceived policies as non-implementable due to a lack of cooperation from other stakeholders or interference from other stakeholders. Some school heads failed to provide good leadership and created differences among other staff leading to a sense of mistrust and power struggle. This implies that in the sampled schools, heads in Tanzania were ineffective to manage students' discipline in their respective schools.

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Discipline issues among students in educational institutions have gotten a lot of attention around the world, including in Malawi. Indeed, many education experts around the world have been interested in the factors that contribute to differences in student discipline between schools and locations. Students' lack of discipline leads to undesirable outcomes such as destruction of school property, violence, low academic performance, particularly on national examinations, and unacceptable student behavior. The Malawian government places a great deal of confidence in the type of leadership that exists in educational institutions, but it has not yielded fruits for the country. Malawi's Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2014) raised that student discipline in secondary schools has been a subject of debate in many forums. Destruction of school property, assault, indecent bad behavior such as sexual relationships between opposite-sex resulting in teenage pregnancies and dropout, especially among girls, theft, teasing, and bullying, drug and substance abuse, rudeness, and open defiance of authority, failure to observe school rules and regulations, lack of interest in education, and among others are all examples of student indiscipline.

The number of students' unrest/ strikes in public secondary schools in Mulanje district, Malawi has been increasing since the year 2017. For instance, there were 10 strikes in the year 2017, 8 strikes in 2018, 9 strikes in 2019, and 2 strikes in 2020 (Education Division Office, April 22, 2021). This is an indication that there is a problem in the schools. The head teachers are the overall overseers of students' discipline in secondary schools. Could it be the leadership styles that the head teachers that influence students' discipline in secondary schools? This study, therefore, investigated the influence of head teachers' leadership styles on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Mulanje District, Malawi. A similar study by Tembo (2015) was conducted on an exploratory of mob students' vandalism in secondary schools: perspectives of students in the northern education division of Malawi. The study revealed that the unprofessional conduct of teachers and poor management, misunderstanding between the administration and students' grievances due to poor diet (eating rotten beans daily), teachers' late attendance to classes, and absconding from classes due to watching football in the staff room were the main contributing factors of vandalism in northern Malawi. This implies that ineffective leadership contributed to causes of vandalism in schools.

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Kachepa (2015) looked at the elements that contribute to student indiscipline in Malawi's residential secondary schools: a case study of selected secondary schools in the Central West Education Division. The findings found that home issues such as a poor relationship between parents and their children, media influence at home, parents not providing essential school resources for their children, and parental approaches to dealing with misbehavior all contributed to kids' indiscipline. Further, the students' lack of interest in school, involvement in sexual activities, drug and substance abuse, and negative influence of peer pressure also contributed to indiscipline. Even teachers' unprofessional conduct, poor delivery of teaching services, and inappropriate management of emergent indiscipline cases during the lessons contributed to students' indiscipline. The study also revealed that the administration's inability to address students' complaints appropriately was a factor that contributed to students' indiscipline in the three boarding secondary schools in the Central West Education Division in Malawi.

Statement of the Problem

Effective leadership is key to the success of the school because it provides guidance, purpose and helps others to understand the goals of education. Leadership serves several functions crucial to the success of the school; one of these functions is to provide a clear vision and explain what members must do to achieve that vision. This is done by providing a roadmap and outlining the steps and resources the school needs to become successful. The core function of the school is to provide quality teaching and learning. These services are provided by the teaching force comprising multi-talented individuals with the right skills and experience to assist learners to attain good results. It is the responsibility of the school head to foster an atmosphere of creativity in the school, provide flexibility on how employees work, motivate the staff and students, and give insights on how to perform the delegated duties to improve efficiency to achieve excellence.

However, there has been public concern about the way heads of public secondary schools manage their institutions in Mulanje district Malawi. Deterioration of students' discipline is on the increase and has been a debate in many forums. Statistics from the Division Education office (2021) indicate a considerable number of student unrests have been witnessed in schools. For instance, there have been cases of vandalism of school property, assaults, drug and substance abuse, open defiance to school authorities, rudeness, and involvement in sexual relations leading to teen pregnancies among others. Head teachers, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders are complaining about these unacceptable behaviors of students. They are also questioning whether or not the head teachers' leadership was responsible for the massive destruction in schools. If these vices are not eradicated, students will continue to be unruly, perform poorly in their academics, have low transition rates and school drops out as well as an increase in moral decadence in the society. Although the Ministry of Education has put interventions of offering leadership training to head teachers through the Malawi Institute of Education to enhance discipline but still, indiscipline is prevalent in secondary schools.

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Available literature shows that studies have been done on leadership in schools. For instance, Rundassa's (2017) study focused on school leadership practices and problems in secondary schools in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia. It was found that principals' lack of training in leadership skills contributed to problems. Tempo (2015) explored the student mob vandalism in secondary schools in Malawi and established that the unprofessional conduct of teachers of absconding classes, poor management, and poor diet in boarding schools contributed to students' indiscipline. Limited literature has examined how the head teachers' leadership style influences student discipline in Mulanje District Malawi which necessitated the current study

Theoretical Framework

Path-Goal Theory of Leadership was one of the theory supported the study. According to Murage (2014) as cited in Gathura (2021, pp. 37-38) the Path-Goal Theory of leadership, which was developed by Robert House in 1971, focused on studying the effect of a leader's behavior. House was focused on the leader's behavior s specifically supportive, directive, achievement-oriented, and participative behavior on subordinates' motivation and performance based on the leader-follower concept. According to the theory, a leader's behavior is contingent on employee satisfaction, employee motivation, and employee performance. The theory focuses on how the leader's behavior motivates the followers by influencing their views of what may occur based on their different levels of effort on the job. In other words, the path-goal theory of leadership explain how leaders motivate and assist their followers in achieving the organization's goals and objectives. This is accomplished by clearing a road for followers to choose which way to walk, removing impediments, and rewarding good performance (Henkel, & Bourdeau, 2018, p.8).

According to the theory, a leader's style or behavior can be identified to achieve a goal that is acceptable to the employee and work environment (House, 1971 and Clerk, 2016). It is based on Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, which asserts that an individual's behavior is driven by the individual's expectation of a given outcome and the attractiveness of that outcome (Clerk, 2016). This means that students can be encouraged to behave accordingly if they are convinced that doing so could add value to their lives, particularly in passing examinations. The theory can be thought of as a process in which leaders select specific behaviors that are best suited to the demands of their employees and the working environment to best direct them along their path to achieving their goal.

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The theory emphasizes the following basic steps: identify employee and environmental characteristics, select leadership style, and concentrate on motivational aspects that should assist employees to succeed. This implies that for schools to achieve good discipline, leaders must provide direction in the form of set goals and how to get there. This is why most schools strive to produce good citizens who are responsible and disciplined. For this to be achieved, head teachers must provide directions and support to the students to achieve their goals. Effective leadership is a function of the interaction between leader behavior and situational or contingency variables of subordinate traits and environmental factors, according to the path-goal theory. Employee attitudes and behavior are influenced by these contingency factors, which interact with leader behavior. This implies that the head teacher can influence the attitude and behavior of students by interacting with situational aspects in the school environment. According to Murage et al (2017), the theory claims that a leader's behavior is influenced by the satisfaction, motivation, and performance of his or her subordinates. For the followers to comprehend the policies, the leader defines goals, clarifies the objective, and removes obstacles. In expounding the set procedures they may be commanded or misleading. In increasing rewards they may give occasional encouragement or pave the way.

The leadership styles comprise supportive, directive, achievement-oriented, and participative. The Path-Goal Theory indicates that effective leadership encompasses the identification of the most suitable leadership behavior in various situations. The theory emphasizes the following procedures: finding out the condition under which the employees are working; using a management approach that inspires followers or subordinates to attain goals. This implies that for good discipline to be achieved in schools head teachers must provide direction through set goals and how to get there to achieve goals.

According to Clerk (2016), the path-goal theory states that the leader participates in behaviors that complement and compensate for the subordinate's abilities. In a school system, the head teacher is typically considered a role model who guides and encourages pupils in choosing the best paths to fulfill their objectives. The theory was applicable to help head teachers to direct students' behavior by organizing motivational talks, and providing guidance and counseling in schools to equip students with knowledge and skills of correcting their deviant behavior. For the society to be transformed in terms of development it needs people who are educated with good morals and of standards behavior who can transform the lives of people in the society.

Mutune, et al (2019) asserts that, in essence, the path-goal theory is a contingency leadership theory designed to explain how leaders would help followers along a path to goals by selecting specific leadership behaviors that are most appropriate to the followers' needs and to the situation in which the followers are working. In a school context, therefore the path-goal theory of leadership was applicable to head teachers to direct students to reach their goals by setting school rules and regulations to be followed to maintain discipline in schools. By implementing rules and regulations by being obedient to the authorities they would achieve their expected goals efficiently and effectively with the guidance and support of their head teachers.

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According to Northouse (2016), the Path-Goal Theory of Leadership has its strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths is that, it provides a framework for a leader's performance of leadership functions by removing any workplace obstacle that hinders goal attainment. Therefore, in a school setup, the head teacher in each particular school should direct students and teachers to reach their goals by assisting them in the activities and ways of solving the solving problems. One of the weaknesses of Path-Goal theory is that, it has been criticized by different researchers firstly for putting too much emphasis on leadership and blamed for promoting a culture of dependency among followers. That it has failed to recognize the ability of followers and for being too cumbersome for use in training people in leadership styles. Despite the weaknesses, the path-goal theory was relevant for the current study because it allowed the researcher to recognize the school leaders (head teachers) who are the most influential people in schools. It has also been stated that the leader should provide directive leadership to students and even teachers by guiding and providing a clear vision and steps followed to achieve that vision. Students in a school setting require guidance and direction when they first arrive at a new institution because they are unfamiliar with the school's rules and regulations, as well as the school culture; hence, orientation is required

Review of Related Literature

Head Teachers' Democratic Leadership Styles on Students' Discipline

Democratic leadership style refers to an approach that recognizes democratic principles of governance and involves people in the process of decision-making. In a school setup, a democratic head teacher involves students in selecting their leaders, holds meeting with students to discuss discipline issues, allows students to give their views concerning discipline, involves student leaders in decision making, discusses students' discipline issues with parents, consult discipline committee before administering punishment, involve form teachers to manage discipline issues in their classes, involve students in the formulation of rules and regulations, encourages students to work hard as a team in their studies by participating in a group discussion or study circles and encourages class prefects to manage discipline by controlling noise in classes. Democratic leaders work as a team and encourage followers to achieve their goals, and in a school context, head teachers encourage students to work hard to achieve their expected goals by maintaining discipline as already articulated.

Nandomuri and Rao (2011) investigated leadership and school principals: a study of secondary school administration methods in Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh, India. More than 75.0 % of school administrators supported a democratic leadership style, according to the research. Private unassisted principals had a high positive tendency for all five qualities tested. Other school leaders excelled just in one trait: motivation, which directly reinforced their desire for a democratic mode of operation. This implies that democratic leadership was mostly preferred by principals for managing schools in terms of discipline, followed by transformational leadership style which was preferred by other school heads for motivating people. The study used a stratified sampling technique to draw a sample of 557 secondary schools in the Krishna district that operate under four different forms of administration. A stratified selection strategy was used to choose a sample of 188 secondary schools in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, India, which represents about 34% of the population. The primary data was gathered from principals of sampled schools using a self-designed questionnaire and interview schedules.

However, the review identified some limitations; for instance, the researcher did not explain how the validity and reliability of the research tools determined which raises concern

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on the accuracy of data collected. The used only two instruments for data collection. The current study mitigated the limitations by subjecting the research tools to content validity with the help of experts in leadership who scrutinized the questionnaire items in terms of content coverage. In addition to questionnaires and interviews guides, current study added documents analysis guide, and observation guide for triangulation purposes. The tools were further pilot tested in one of the schools excluded in the actual study. These ensured deletion of all ambiguities and enhance accuracy of data collected.

Rundassa (2017) conducted a similar study on school leadership practices and problems: the case of some chosen secondary schools in Addis Ababa City, Ethiopia. The research used a descriptive survey design. Five secondary schools were chosen to participate in the study out of a total of 32. Data were collected from 108 teachers, 19 school principals, 18 supervisors, and 55 department heads using a questionnaire, interview guide, and document analysis guide instrument. Data were analyzed using five rating scales in frequencies and percentages. Schools and teachers were selected using random sampling techniques, while principals, supervisors, and department heads were purposively or automatically selected to participate in the study. The study revealed that all school leaders in the selected secondary schools were not qualified with principalship and training in the area of educational leadership. Those principals did not actively involve parents in the school's decision-making. This implies that principals lacked a democratic style of leadership to involve parents in decision-making. The researcher observed that the reviewed study did not explain how quantitative and qualitative data research instruments were validated and measured in terms of reliability, while the current study did it by filling the methodology gap.

In another study, Kolawale, et al (2018) investigated the influence of principals' sex, experience, and age on their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline in public secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a population of 184 principals of public secondary schools using only a questionnaire for data collection. The study revealed that principals adopted three leadership styles namely; democratic leadership style, autocratic leadership style, and laissez-faire leadership style in managing students' indiscipline. Out of the three styles of leadership, the democratic leadership style was the most effective style used by principals in managing students' indiscipline. The reviewed study used only a questionnaire but this study included a questionnaire, interview guides, document analysis guides, and observation guides rather than using only a questionnaire to fill the methodology gap. Further, the reviewed study focused on the influence of principals' sex, experience, and age on their choice of leadership styles in managing students' discipline in public secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District, Nigeria. While this study focused on head teachers' administrative leadership styles on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Mulanje District, Malawi

Wakibi (2018) carried out a study on the influence of head teachers' leadership styles on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Butagaya Sub-County, Kagoma County, Jinja, Uganda. The study used descriptive survey design to explore the influence of head teachers' leadership styles on students' discipline. Using Mugenda and Mugenda (2019), sampling procedure was used to determine the sample size. Sample size of 10% was utilized in obtaining 3 schools with 33 teachers that were used for piloting study. Five (5) students were purposively picked/selected from each of the 3 schools taking part in the piloting study. For the main study, 30% of the total population was used to select 9 head teachers and 99 teachers. Purposive sampling technique was applied to select 10 students

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from each sampled schools. From the 9 schools, 90 students took part in the main study. Head teachers', teachers', students' questionnaires and question guided interviews for head teachers were used for data collection. The study yielded data that were required both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

From the findings of the study, it was established that the common discipline problems experienced in schools were examination cheating (37%), drug abuse (17%) and absenteeism (25%). Findings also indicated that democratic leadership style has a great influence on students' discipline in public secondary schools. Teachers indicated that there is a need for head teachers to use democratic leadership (62.5%) besides transformational (50%) where discipline should be positive and constructive. It was also established that autocratic leadership was exercised in schools by the head teachers. From the results obtained a majority of the teachers disagreed (75%) that the autocratic leadership style is necessary in order to enable people to work as expected. The study recommended that head teachers and teachers should adopt democratic leadership style that is liked by majority.

Namphande, Clark, Farren, and McCully (2017) conducted a study on education for democratic citizenship in Malawian secondary schools: balancing students' voices and adult privilege. A multiple case study design was employed in the study. The design was preferred because it was an exploratory study and the researcher was the main research instrument. Three (3) co-educational secondary schools were selected purposively representing the three different kinds of secondary schools to explore students' participation in school affairs. Data were collected through interviews with head teachers, social studies teachers, and school prefects, and focus group discussions with Form 3 students. In addition, a document analysis guide and direct observation of everyday school practices were made and records were kept in a reflective journal. The observation focused on students' involvement in committees and other school affairs to validate data collected from other sources.

Emergent themes were used to examine the data, which were then explored using detailed descriptions and direct quotes from the participants. The study revealed that different forms of engagement were encouraged in schools, using a multiple case study approach in three distinct types of secondary schools to evaluate students' participation in school matters. Each school introduced kids to many types of citizenship roles. In contrast, though students were encouraged to participate in school affairs, there was a conflict between democratic values and the traditional roles of schools leading to new and hybrid school cultures. This means that students were hardly involved in decision-making because of the two cultures' conflicting one another which prevented students' citizenship roles participation. The reviewed study did not indicate the total sample size of the participants, while the current study had 469 participants from public secondary schools in Mulanje District, Malawi which filled the methodology gap.

Research Design and Methodology

The Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design was adopted, whereby the cross-sectional survey and the phenomenological research designs complemented each other comfortably. The study targeted five categories of participants namely; Education Division Manager, head teachers, deputy head teachers, teachers and students from public secondary schools in Mulanje District, Malawi. The extreme case sampling technique was employed to select schools. Automatic inclusive sampling technique was used to select Education Division Manager, head teachers and deputy head teachers. A stratified sampling technique was used to select teachers and students into strata of class and gender in mixed schools, then selected

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students' respondents from each gender using a simple random sampling technique. In a single school, a purposive sampling technique was used to select students. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews guide, documents analysis guide and observation guide. Instruments were subjected to both content and face validity, then piloted before the researcher used them in the actual field for data collection. The Cronbach Alpha technique was used to test for the reliability of the quantitative instruments. Reliability of qualitative instruments were determined in terms of their trustworthiness particularly credibility and dependability.

Description of Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative technique to analyze the data respectively. The quantitative data collected was sorted, cleaned, coded and entered into a computer with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 software to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data whereby the frequencies and percentages summarized data. The results were presented in frequency distribution tables. Qualitative data obtained from interview guide, document analysis guide and observation guide were organized into themes and presented in narratives form and direct quotes. Ethical Consideration was observed throughout the study, and all sources of information are acknowledged. Oso and Onen (2016) argue that ethical issues are very significant in research because despite the high value of knowledge achieved through research, knowledge cannot be pursued at the expense of human dignity. Therefore, it makes the informed consent to be a major ethical subject of concern.

Presentation, Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

Head Teachers' Democratic Leadership Style on Students' Discipline

Democratic leadership style also known as participative leadership is where the leader involves the members of the group to actively participate in decision-making. In a school setting, it requires the head teacher to engage various stakeholders to solicit multiple views and incorporate them appropriately into the management of the school. This is advantageous because it instills ownership and confidence in decisions made, fosters teamwork as well as generates innovative ideas. This study sought the views of the participating deputy head teachers, teachers, and students on whether the head teacher's democratic leadership style influences students' discipline in public secondary schools. They were provided with a questionnaire comprised of democratic items and were asked to put a tick(✓) on the appropriate option to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, and undecided using the following 5-point Likert Scale.

(1=Strongly Disagree (SD), 2=Disagree (D), 3=Undecided (UD), 4 Agree (A), and 5=Strongly Agree (SA). Their views are presented in Table 1

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Table 1: Students, Teachers, and Deputy Head Teacher's Responses on Head Teachers' Democratic Leadership Style on Student's Discipline. n =326 (S); 112(T); 15(D/HT)

| Statements | R | SD 1 | | D 2 | | UD 3 | | A 4 | | SA 5 | |
|---|------|---------|------|--------|------|---------|------|--------|------|---------|------|
| | | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| Head teacher allows students to give Their views concerning discipline. | S | 33 | 10.1 | 30 | 9.2 | 10 | 3.1 | 132 | 40.5 | 120 | 36.8 |
| | T | 7 | 6.3 | 5 | 4.5 | 6 | 5.4 | 50 | 44.6 | 40 | 35.7 |
| | D/HT | 1 | 6.7 | - | - | - | -- | 3 | 20.0 | 11 | 73.3 |
| Head teacher involves students in Selecting their leaders. | S | 23 | 7.1 | 38 | 11.7 | 16 | 4.9 | 136 | 41.7 | 111 | 34.0 |
| | T | 6 | 5.4 | 5 | 4.5 | 1 | .9 | 54 | 48.2 | 42 | 37.5 |
| | D/HT | - | -- | 1 | 6.7 | - | - | 6 | 40.0 | 8 | 53.3 |
| Head teacher holds meetings with Students to discuss discipline issues. | S | 39 | 12.0 | 56 | 17.2 | 26 | 8.0 | 118 | 36.2 | 83 | 25.5 |
| | T | 9 | 8.0 | 22 | 19.6 | 8 | 7.1 | 45 | 40.2 | 24 | 21.4 |
| | D/HT | 3 | 20.0 | - | -- | - | -- | 8 | 53.3 | 4 | 26.7 |
| Head teacher involves student leaders In decision making. | S | 44 | 13.5 | 59 | 18.1 | 25 | 7.7 | 109 | 33.4 | 85 | 26.1 |
| | T | 9 | 8.0 | 13 | 11.6 | 16 | 14.3 | 45 | 40.2 | 25 | 22.3 |
| | D/HT | - | -- | 1 | 6.7 | 2 | 13.3 | 9 | 60.0 | 3 | 20.0 |
| Head teacher discusses students Discipline with parents. | S | 26 | 8.0 | 33 | 10.1 | 27 | 8.3 | 127 | 39.0 | 108 | 33.1 |
| | T | 3 | 2.7 | 7 | 6.3 | 10 | 8.9 | 56 | 50.0 | 31 | 27.7 |
| | D/HT | 1 | 6.7 | - | -- | 1 | 6.7 | 7 | 46.7 | 6 | 40.0 |
| Head teacher consults discipline Committee prior to administer Punishment. | S | - | -- | - | -- | 54 | 16.6 | - | -- | - | -- |
| | T | 7 | 6.3 | 6 | 5.4 | 8 | 7.1 | 65 | 58.0 | 26 | 23.2 |
| | D/HT | 2 | 13.3 | - | -- | - | -- | 8 | 53.3 | 5 | 33.3 |
| Head teacher involves Form Teachers To manage discipline issues in their Classes, | S | 45 | 13.8 | 28 | 8.6 | 22 | 6.7 | 118 | 36.2 | 108 | 33.1 |
| | T | 12 | 10.7 | 21 | 18.8 | 12 | 10.7 | 42 | 37.5 | 21 | 18.8 |
| | D/HT | - | -- | 3 | 20.0 | - | -- | 5 | 33.3 | 7 | 46.7 |
| Head teacher involves students in Formulation of rules and regulations. | S | 37 | 11.3 | 43 | 13.2 | 30 | 9.2 | 120 | 36.8 | 93 | 28.5 |
| | T | 7 | 6.3 | 5 | 4.5 | 4 | 3.6 | 52 | 46.4 | 40 | 35.7 |
| | D/HT | 1 | 6.7 | 1 | 6.7 | 1 | 6.7 | 5 | 33.3 | 7 | 46.7 |
| Head teacher encourages students to Work hard in their studies as a team by Participating in study circles. | S | 13 | 4.0 | 20 | 6.1 | 11 | 3.4 | 126 | 38.7 | 153 | 46.9 |
| | T | 6 | 5.4 | 7 | 6.3 | 1 | .9 | 60 | 53.9 | 32 | 28.6 |
| | D/HT | 1 | 6.7 | 1 | 6.7 | - | - | 4 | 26.7 | 9 | 60.0 |
| Head teacher encourages class prefects To manage discipline by controlling Noise makers in classes. | S | 12 | 3.7 | 8 | 2.5 | 7 | 2.1 | 114 | 35.0 | 181 | 55.5 |
| | T | 5 | 4.5 | 8 | 7.1 | 8 | 7.1 | 51 | 45.5 | 34 | 30.4 |
| | D/HT | - | -- | 2 | 13.3 | 1 | 6.7 | 7 | 46.7 | 5 | 33.3 |

Source: Field Data, 2021.

KEY; R= Respondents, S =Students=Teachers, and D/HT = Deputy Head Teachers.

Table 1 indicate various responses of the participants on various items. On whether the head teachers allow students to give their views on discipline, a majority of 252(77.5%)

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of student participants, 90 (80.4 %) of the teachers, and 14(93.3%) of deputy head teachers agreed. In a school setting when students through their student-leaders are allowed to contribute their views on various matters affecting their lives, it encourages them to accept the outcomes of the decisions made. Students feel confident and happy as part and parcel of the school management thus creating a conducive environment where they correct one another's offenses with brotherly and sisterly love. The students' views were corroborated by some head teachers during an interview when one in school 012 remarked:

I allow students through their leaders to share their views concerning discipline because they can tell you issues that are happening in the school that as a head teacher you are not aware of it. For instance, in 2018 a certain girl was found pregnant and was about to abort. Her fellow students reported the issue directly to my office. The office forwarded the case to the disciplinary committee and parents were called to discuss the issue. After discussion, the girl was sent home for a term of maternity leave and she reported back to school after delivery to proceed with her studies. This was in line with the Human Rights Declaration 1948 on the children's right to education. (SSHT12 Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

The response of the head teacher shows the power of participative leadership whereby people take personal responsibility to make constructive decisions to support one another. By consulting others, the head teacher was able to discuss the issues to consolidate a comprehensive view of the matter and come to a consensus. Although the situation was traumatic, the girl was counseled to accept her situation and promised to return to school to continue her studies after getting a baby. That created harmony between the family and the school management as well as the entire student body.

It is important to note that some participants had different opinions whereby a minority of 63(19.3%) of the students, 12(10.8%) of teachers, and 1(6.7%) of deputy head teachers disagreed with the head teacher seeking students' views concerning discipline. The findings agree with the study of Odhiambo (2016) study which revealed that the democratic leadership style was partially practiced where most principals chose when or not to involve members in decision making.

On whether the head teacher involves students in selecting their leaders in schools, a majority of 14(93.3%) deputy head teachers, 96(85.7%) teachers, and 247(75.8%) students strongly agreed. Only a minimal number of 9(3.1%) of students and 6(5.4%) of teachers were undecided. This implies that in the sampled schools, head teachers include students to select student leaders of their choice to assist the school administration in the smooth running of the school. Students feel happy and motivated that they are counted as part and parcel of the administration. This creates a harmonious environment for both students and teachers in a school, and it also helps to influence discipline in schools. The findings concur with Kiprob (2015) study which revealed that the democratic leadership style has a great influence on students' discipline in public secondary schools.

Although students are involved in the school electoral process, the final decision on who takes the leadership lies in the hands of the school leadership and the teachers. This applies in situations where the selected student is deemed by the school administration as being unfit for leadership due to their involvement in anti-social activities that may trigger student riots. The school leadership has the authority to replace that position with a more

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responsible student. This could be the reason why a minority of 61(18.8%) of students, 11(9.9%) of teachers, and 1(6.7%) of deputy head teachers disagreed with the statement that the head teacher allows students to select their leaders.

Concerning whether the head teacher holds meetings with students to discuss discipline issues, 201 (61. %) of the students, 69(61.6%) of the teachers, and 12(80%) of the deputy head teachers agreed. The study found that both formal and ad hoc student meetings were held in schools to discuss the welfare of the entire student body. Such meetings were considered important because students had a chance to air their grievances concerning academic issues, teachers' absenteeism, and inadequate food among others. The schools that utilized student meetings were very constructive and rarely experienced student riots compared with those that did not. The findings confirm Kiprob (2015) study that head teachers hold frequent student meetings to discuss issues pertaining discipline of the school. Conducting frequent student meetings is very essential because students feel cared for, become accountable, and take responsibility for their behavior in observing school rules and regulations.

Some study participants comprising 95(29.1%) students, 31(27.6%) teachers, and 3(20.0%) deputy head teachers pointed out that some of the head teachers never held regular meetings with students by disagreeing with the statement. Students in high school are mostly in the adolescent stage undergoing both emotional and physical stress. In addition factors such as an overloaded curriculum, too much work from their teachers, lack of fees, and inadequate preparation for examinations can trigger fear of failure among students. If not addressed appropriately through frequent meetings with students to clarify issues; they are likely to trigger mass indiscipline.

Good decision-making and problem-solving encompass teamwork. Decision-making refers to the process of choosing the best alternative from among alternatives. In a school setting students need to be equipped with decision-making skills to enable them to make the correct decisions in various situations they encounter in school. This was indicated in a response given to a statement about whether the head teacher involves the student in decision-making; a majority of 12(80%) of the deputy head teachers, 194(59.5%) of the students, and 69(66.1%) of the teachers agreed. In a school setting, student leaders are part and parcel of the administration and management of the school, and they feel happy when they are involved in decision-making on matters that affect their lives. The researcher found that various approaches were utilized to involve students in decision-making. The common one across all the sampled schools was the election of the student council or leadership. The latter collected other students' concerns and forwarded them to the school administration for remedial action. Other approaches utilized included suggestion boxes to voice their concerns and brainstorming about issues before they agreed on disciplinary action to be taken against the culprits. This was confirmed by one of the head teachers in school 014 during an interview on ways they engage students in decision-making when he said:

During students' meetings concerning students' late coming to school, the majority of the students said that those who are coming late to school should be punished to deter such a recurring phenomenon. This has enabled each student to be punctual all the time since it was a decision they all agreed on. In some instances, those who came late were punished, and others learned from them (SSHT 14, Personal communication, April 12th, 2020).

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The participant's response shows the importance of involving learners to make rules and abide by them. This empowered students with the ability to make the right choices that positively influence punctuality in their schools as well as their studies. The head teachers' use of a democratic leadership style by involving students' leaders in decision-making in schools influenced students' discipline greatly. The findings are in agreement with Mbogori's (2012) study which indicated that the democratic leadership style involves students in disciplinary decision-making for school discipline management and has a great influence on students' discipline. Despite the positive impact, some participants of the study contradicted the statement when 103(31.6%) of students, 22(20.0%) of teachers and 1(6.7%) deputy head teachers reported that some head teachers do not involve students in decision making in matters that affect them. Lack of involvement created in students a feeling of not only being uncared for or unrecognized by the school but also demoralized their active participation in school activities. It was cited as one of the causes of students' unrest.

Parents are part and parcel of the school management and they deserve to be included in school activities for maintaining the discipline of students. On whether the head teacher discusses students' discipline with parents, the majority of 13(86.8%) deputy head teachers, 87(77.7%) of teachers, and 235(72.1%) of students agreed. The study found in some schools head teachers organized open days or Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) meetings where parents come to meet with head teachers and teachers to discuss the welfare of their children. It is here that parents are informed about the progress of their children and encouraged to be involved in guiding and counseling their children to maintain the discipline of the school. The findings confirm Nandomuri and Rao's (2011) study, which found that the majority (75.0%) of school heads preferred a democratic leadership style in which parents were involved in decision-making concerning discipline issues of their children. On the other hand, some of the study participants pointed out different opinions whereby 59(18.1%) of students, 10(9.0%) teachers, and 1(6.7%) deputy head teachers disagreed that head teachers involve parents.

In a school, the principal does not work alone, all teachers are endowed with various responsibilities to work as a team to sustain discipline. On whether the head teacher consults the discipline committee before administering punishment, the findings indicated that the majority of 13(86.7%) deputy head teachers and 91(81.2%) teachers agreed. None of the students' participants commented on this.

The study found that every school had established a disciplinary committee to sort out emerging problems amongst students. The offenders were referred to the disciplinary committee for interrogation; they determined the nature of the offense in line with the already established school policies, and the kind of punishment to be administered and gave a report to the head teachers. Analysis of records from punishment books indicated that offenses committed by students comprised misunderstandings among students, fighting, bullying, loss of items, and non-performance of allocated duties among others. Sorting out these issues enables learners' to be settled, live together harmoniously, and concentrated on their studies. The democratic or rather participative kind of leadership employed by some of the head teachers was significant because the course of action taken was out of a consensus. The findings of this study underpin that of Kendi (2018), which revealed that head teachers interact with discipline committees concerning students' discipline problems before deciding on punishment.

However, the study found out that not all head teachers consulted school committees as some were termed redundant. This was confirmed by 26(23.2%) teachers and 2(13.3%)

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deputy head teachers who disagreed that head teachers consulted the discipline committee before administering punishments. The study found that some head teachers sent the students home without passing through the discipline committee which was unethical

In another statement, study participants were asked to indicate whether the head teacher involves Form teachers to manage discipline issues in their classes. The findings indicated that a majority of 12(80.0%) deputy head teachers, 226(69.3%) of students, and 63(56.3%) of teachers agreed with the statement. This is in line with the Malawian Ministry of Education guidelines. That the Form teachers have the responsibilities of maintaining class discipline and maintaining class records which include class attendance, scholastic, and period registers. They have also the responsibility of participating in the formulation of class rules and routines, compiling test results, participating in disciplinary committee meetings(when required), coordinating with the administration on class-related issues, providing guidance and counseling to students and among others (MoEST, 2014, p.7).

Areas, where form teachers involved students in making rules, included observation of silence in classrooms, reading ahead of teachers, and correct use of class discussion during their free time. In schools that utilized these activities, students were actively engaged in learning and improved in academic performance than in schools where learners practiced individualized learning.

Available literature indicates lack of guidance and counseling for students contributes to students' indiscipline in schools. The study found that schools, where head teachers involved Form teachers to provide guidance and counseling to students, helped maintain discipline in all aspects of school life. The findings confirm that of Chege, Salgony, and Ngumi (2016), who found that school-based guidance and counseling organized by Form Teachers improved students' academic performance and discipline. However, some respondents had different opinions whereby 33(29.5%) of teachers, 73(22.4%) of students, and 3(20.0%) of deputy head teachers strongly disagreed with the statement

One of the factors that help in the smooth running of the school is well-established school rules and regulations that create standards of quality teaching and learning. Study participants were requested to state whether the head teacher involves students in the formulation of rules and regulations. The findings indicated that a majority of 92(82.1%) of teachers, 12(80.0%) of deputy head teachers, and 213(65.3%) of students agreed with the statement. The researcher was informed that students' views were scrutinized by the teachers and approved by the Board of Management before their implementation. The school leadership explained to students all these rules especially in forums and in assembly. The researcher observed that the same rules were displayed in classrooms, laboratories, dining halls, and dormitories to remind students of what is expected of them when they are in each designated area. The involvement of students in the formulation of rules and regulations makes them accountable for their actions and hence acquire self-discipline.

The finding corroborates that of Maingi, Maithya, Mulwa, and Migosi (2017) study on the influence of school rules and regulations on student discipline in Makueni County, Kenya. The principals' participative approach to the formulation of rules and regulations make students own the process, obey rules and regulations, and results in high levels of student discipline. In addition, Kendi (2018) study concurred that engaging students in the formulation of rules and regulations make them feel happy of being recognized and counted by the school to be part of the administration for managing discipline hence avoiding indiscipline behaviors. However, some participants contradicted this view when they disagreed with the statement that the head teacher involves students in formulating school

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rules. Those who negated the view comprised 80 (24.5%) of students, 12(10.7%) of teachers, and 3(20%) of deputy head teachers.

On whether the head teacher encourages students to work hard in their studies as a team by participating in study circles (group discussions). The findings indicated that the majority, of 13(86.7%) deputy head teachers, 279(85.6%) of students, and 92(82.1%) teachers agreed. This was confirmed by one of the head teachers in school 015 during an interview when he said:

I encourage students to work hard as a team in their studies by participating in study circles or group discussions. I provide students with past papers on different subjects in the school curriculum to work together to find answers. I also encourage teachers to give students quiz competitions in their classes so that they can improve their academic performance. (SSHT 15, Personal communication, April 13, 2021).

The response of the head teachers indicates the importance of the students' cooperative learning. The formation of study groups is beneficial to students because they support one another by sharing innovative study skills. Furthermore, asking questions, seeking clarification, and sharing information makes learning enjoyable because students get new perspectives and incorporate them with their own. The study found that in schools where study groups were functioning effectively, procrastination was eliminated because students agreed to meet at a certain time to discuss academic issues. Students suggested topics they found difficult before the meeting; these were discussed, explained, and illustrated with examples; which enabled students to improve their academic performance more than in schools where learning was more individualistic. It was evident that schools where head teachers utilized the participative leadership style encountered fewer indiscipline cases than schools that did not. The findings are related to those of Kendi's (2018) study who found that (36.9%) of teachers revealed that head teachers frequently encouraged students to work hard in their studies to improve their performance and behavior-wise by sharing experiences of tolerating one view in terms of discipline. However, some participants had different opinions whereby a small percentage of 2(13.3%) of deputy head teachers 13(11.6%) of teachers, and 33(10.1%) of students disagreed with the statement.

One way of helping students study well is to control noise making in class. This is because maintaining silence creates a favorable classroom environment for teachers to teach learners without distractions. The students can understand and follow what is being taught. On whether the head teacher encourages class prefects to manage discipline by controlling noise makers in classes. The majority of 295(90.5%) students, 12(80.0%) deputy head teachers, and 85(75.9%) teachers agreed with the statement. In a school setting, there are class prefects whose responsibility is to assist in maintaining discipline by writing down noise makers and forwarding them to their class teachers for disciplinary action. They also act as a bridge between the administration and fellow students in schools.

However, some participants had different views whereby 2(13.3%) of deputy head teachers, 13 (11.6%) of teachers, and 20 (6.1%) of students disagreed that head teachers do not encourage class prefects to manage discipline by controlling noise makers in classes. This category of participants might have misunderstood the statement. All schools have regulations about silence while the classes are in progress. Distractions from unauthorized movement along corridors, constructions near classrooms, and noise-making from nearby

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classrooms are pervasive. This is because noise impedes students' ability to learn or comprehend the content being taught. Excessive noise creates conflicts among students who want to study silently and those who want to talk.

The study findings are consistent with those of Wakibi (2018) who found that (50.0 %) of teachers revealed that deviant students who make noise in class are punished by their class prefects. Class prefects have the responsibility to punish their fellow students if they are making noise in class without any fear to instill discipline in schools.

In one of the open-ended questions in a questionnaire, the study sought information from participants' opinions on whether the use of a democratic leadership style influences students' discipline in public secondary schools. The majority, 264(81.0%) of students, 81(72.3%) of teachers, and 10(66.7%) of deputy head teachers confirmed that democratic leadership style influences students' discipline. The rationale is that when the school leadership communicates effectively and involves students, teachers, and parents in decision-making, they accept and own the deliberations and get committed to ensuring their success. The finding supports Akala et al, (2019), who found that the democratic leadership style has a great significant influence on student discipline due to effective communication skills and the involvement of students, teachers, and parents in decision making. Furthermore, they found that schools employing a democratic leadership style had fewer cases of indiscipline (66.0 %) than schools lacking a democratic leadership style (68.9 %).

Some participants had different opinions whereby 4(26.7%) of deputy head teachers, 22 (19.6%) of teachers, and 61 (18.7%) of students viewed the head teachers' democratic leadership style as negatively influencing students' discipline. For instance, students have too much freedom if the head teachers do not use it accordingly.)The findings of this study are also in agreement with those of Namphande et al., (2017), who found that although students were encouraged to participate in school activities, there was a conflict between democratic values and traditional school roles, leading to new and hybrid school cultures. A *hybrid school* and blended learning are the ideal future development and transformation of schools. Such an integrated school system with a democratic leadership style is intercultural, inclusive, and multi-dimensional in mission. In an interview guide, the Education Division Manager of the District remarked that:

Though many schools follow a democratic leadership style, it takes time for head teachers to consult with students and teachers. They feel bored because time is squandered for teaching and learning. (EDM, Personal communication, April 22nd, 2021).

The response shows that although democratic leadership is beneficial, it consumes time if not utilized well.

Conclusion

From the aforementioned findings, the study concludes that head teachers' democratic leadership style has a great significant influence on both positive and negative sides. On the positive side, the style involves and consults students and teachers in decision-making, allows students to select their leaders, and encourages students and teachers to work as a team in schools and among others. On the negative side, it is time-consuming for the head teacher to consult every member of staff before a decision is made. People feel bored and consume their time for teaching. There is also too much freedom that every individual has to contribute to a

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decision making whether the decision to be made is good or bad. Therefore, the study concludes that democratic leadership is practiced in public secondary schools in Mulanje District, Malawi. and when utilized well enhances students discipline.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology need to ensure that discipline in schools is maintained for the smooth running of schools. The Education Division Manager should ensure that there is smooth running of schools and encouraging discipline in schools and find strategies for mitigating challenges encountered by head teachers in influencing students' discipline in schools by the use of democratic leadership style. Head teachers need to find out their own time why, where, when, to involve students and teachers in decision making concerning disciplinary issues not during teaching and learning activities. Parents should ensure that they attend PTA (Parents Teachers Association) meetings and be involved in decision-making on disciplinary issues concerning their children. Teachers need to counsel students and encourage them in good behavior and work as a team and interact with them to enhance discipline. Students should ensure that they work as a team in order to achieve their goals, adhere to school rules and regulations, respect authorities, maintain discipline in schools and adhere to dressing code, for instance wearing full school uniform and among others.

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